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## Book Review: Stepping Twice Into the River: Following Dakota Waters

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*Stepping Twice Into the River: Following Dakota Waters.* By Robert King. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005. xii + 203 pp. Map, endnotes. \$55.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

During his year-long journey along North Dakota's Sheyenne River, Robert King travels not merely for pleasure or personal fulfillment but to share "local truth true in general," in the process discovering how North Dakota's "Nowhere" becomes "Everywhere." The book's title and controlling metaphor come from Heraclitus, who insisted that one cannot step into the same river twice. King, however, seeks to do just that, claiming that he intends to "step into the same river" as did French geographer

Joseph Nicollet, who crossed the Sheyenne in the 1830s while mapping the Mississippi waterway.

King "write[s] down water," considering the dialectical relationship between landscape and history, permanence and change, as he crosses, canoes, or contemplates the river. The idea that everything changes is only a "half-truth," King claims, noting material evidence of this relationship in a sacred landmark such as the Standing Rock, solid and immovable, but also "an emblem of wandering." This dialectic is also revealed through nature's "spiritual hieroglyphics": noting the effects of erosion and current in a river, he considers Van Dyke's metaphor likening a river's relationship with its banks to the "union of soul and body"—"movement defined by its limitations." This tension between stability and mobility acquires contemporary significance in light of North Dakota's fluctuating population—we are a nomad state, King observes, "not quite sure how we make a home for ourselves here" in this land that is, ultimately, "a landscape for journeys."

King's journey might be philosophically invigorating but it also reveals disquieting cultural patterns. Considering the dominant culture's relationship with indigenous populations, he notes how "history acts like water," running on, narrowing, and then disappearing, as in the case of the Dakota Conflict of 1862: "Sioux uprising, uprisen, and gone." He feels "disoriented" following the "trail of war" General Henry Sibley and others have left behind, a historical trail of racism, violence, and forgetfulness we continue to retrace, as King's xenophobic lunch companion in an Aneta, ND, coffee shop reminds him. Following this encounter, King observes that he "thought the language in which battles were written would make no difference to me but I was almost smothered by its rhetoric of righteousness," and he fails to find a "perspective" that would make such history "easier to view."

Yet King develops an appreciation for the complexities of historical construction and influence. He understands that while it might

be "foolish to call a thing a river—its nature so dependent on everything before, after, around, and ahead of it, so full of growth and limitation that it couldn't carry a single name," it is also "foolish not to call everything a river." He is reluctant to leave a sod house at the river's end because it is the "last of the beginning of the river," and the "moment I started to leave it, I'd start to leave everything." As with all significant travel experiences, King's journey has changed him, but he has not necessarily found himself, "only Everything Else," which is indeed fortunate for the rest of us.

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